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P'an Ku

Broward Community College's Student Literary/Arts Magazine



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Cover Illustration: "Inheritors of Fame" Etching by John Bocchino

Scott E. Coventry

Preface

It has finally happened! This issue of P'an Ku has better art than any other P'an Ku or It's magazine ever had. In the past our strongest points were design and poetry, but our friends on Central Campus have pulled through and given us some of the best art in not only this issue, but any student literary/arts magazine I've seen. The artwork here is sensitive and alluring and has a slight touch of on-the-edge sophistication. I don't want to say that the poetry, prose, or photography are weak; on the contrary, all the other aspects that make this issue are as strong as ever.

I just want to thank the people in the Central Campus Print-making class for some fantastic works. I hope the final printed piece does your artwork justice.

There is one thing that disturbs me about this issue though, and that's its lack of cutting-edge, Nick Navarro offending works. There's no nudity, very little profanity, nothing even near the sharp edge of the razor. Why is that? Did the Campus Republicans threaten to raise taxes for anyone who supports the magazine through

submission of risqué pieces? Did all the liberal minds get seduced by the Cosby Show? Did the creative writing departments forget to stress that without pushing the limits of the art the art becomes stale (the same holds true for the art and photography classes)? I just want to know? We work very hard to get art and writing that pushes the bounds of Broward County's nightlife (which for those who are new here, consists of one club: "Squeeze"), and then after an issue with well-hung nude men and the word "Fuck" spread like strawberries and cream on a good evening, we put this "nice" (and tame) issue out. Please, next issue, wake me up and make me feel bad about something like poverty, homeless people, animal abuse, sexual or racial discrimination, our President (well, no, I already feel bad enough about that), or Two-Live Crew. I need my reality check every now and then so that I can feel secure in the knowledge that the world is only getting less and less free.

Okay, I'm finished ribbing on the republicans. So how 'bout those Kurds?

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Rachel Wagner

Is No More

In northwest Minnesota long ago
Sioux roamed the plains,
Sharing space with animal brothers
survival their only aim,
Living free, as one with nature
caring for their hallowed range,
Taking only what they needed
wasting nothing, using all.

Driving now along this highway
lustrous moonbeams guide my path,
Here and there a darkened farmhouse
farmers sleep from drudging toil,
Breezes sway the ripening cornfields
promising a new day.

What has happened to the red men
born as life blood to this land?
Guardian of the natural cycles
grateful to the sun and rain,
Sioux live now on a reservations
raped of all that once theirs,
Dark eyes mirror inner keening
for a life that is no more.

Rachel Wagner

Treblinka

Treblinka, Poland*

The earth is unquiet here.
 Wind and rain and insects
 And small burrowing animals
 Stir the sandy soil
 Bringing to the surface
 Small white and gray flecks
 Of compressed ashes and
 Bits of bone.
 By a crumbled cornerstone
 Lies a fragment of skull,
 A piece of an adult's finger
 Bone and a child's rib.

At Trebling one sees nothing
 And everything.
 Here there was no function,
 No form of slave labor.
 Only single minded, frenzied
 Slaughter.
 Here there are rough-hewn stones,
 Hand-carved memorials.
 One for each town exterminated.
 The curator says that birds
 Never sin here.

I believe him.

*Treblinka was a Nazi extermination camp; bull-dozed to the ground in 1945 just prior to the surrender of Nazi Germany, in an attempt to erase every trace of the camp.

Rachel Wagner

Old Heidleberg, 1948

Grosspapa died in the
First World War,
Papa in the Second. Hans, too,
At Leningrad.

Nothing much happens here.
A few shops change hands; the
Old baker died. One bank
Closed. Wolf's brewery burned.

Old ladies still wear funny shoes
And long, seedy furs
That smell of camphor and camomile
And wear kerchiefs on their heads.

Students at the University
Put up a swastika, then
Took it down. They now
Quote Karl Marx and
Distrust Americans on principle.

The photo of papa where he wears
A flyer's cap sits on the table
by the window. Hans' picture
Is there, too.
Sometimes, mama looks at them.

Grossmama sweeps the front stoop,
The slate walk, and the cobblestones
In the street.
Every day, even when it rains.
Mama cooks and cleans and washes
The windows; once a week.

They grow jungles in pots
In the parlor; lush tropics
Framed by lacy white curtains.
They coax the earth with plant
Food and scrub the leaves.

In their barren world without men
They hope for the sun but
Mostly it rains.



Brenda Silva

For the Love of Skiing

As you close your eyes and begin the fall, you can hear the faraway voice of past childhood. However, the voice isn't that of a favorite friend or teacher, it is the voice of Rod Serling. He is whispering to you in a tone that lulls you into a state of semi-sleep.

"Come with me on a journey, if you will. A journey through your senses and your mind, through space and time. A journey that will leave you breathless once you arrive, and make you desperate to return. This is a journey into the erotic zone."

His voice fades out and you find your self at the bottom of a snow-covered mountain, apparently the so-called journey that he spoke of will begin here. All you can see for miles around in any direction is snow, and the gleaming reflections of the sun on it. It is approximately thirty degrees on this day, but you do not notice. You have no clothes on your body, but you are not cold.

You then glance down and see skis on both of your feet, and poles in each of your hands. You ask no question; you know exactly what to do. By pushing yourself around, you begin to get the knack for it and are ready to begin your journey. You are very nervous, but your desire to complete your journey pushes away the cowardice within you, and so you go forward.

Because you are starting so low on

the mountain, you begin to wonder if you will have time to complete the entire process, but desire outweighs that concern as well. Meanwhile, a little smile begins to creep out of your face when you think about the illicit pleasure of this type of skiing. With there being no people around, the sky is just the limit that you want.

So you begin your climb. With every few steps that, you take, you slide a little backward. So you push even harder the next time thinking that if you keep on pushing harder and faster, you can win over the backslide. You just start to believe that until you reach halfway up the mountain, and slide all the way back down.

Frustrated and a little disappointed, you begin to entertain ideas of giving up. But you can't, because the coolness feels so good on your body and the air smells so clean and crisp. So you set your mind on seeing the other side of the mountain.

So you begin again, very cautious of the backside all the way up this time. It takes a bit more strength and muscle to do so, but you don't care, you desperately move on.

Building up perspiration not that the air can no longer cool, you begin to realize a special warmth way down inside of you, knowing that your destination is near. It is not really a heat, but a warmth, and it is growing with every single step up the mountain.

By the time that the top of the mountain is in sight, you can barely contain yourself. you move faster toward it, feeling every muscle in your body cry out in agony. By now, the warmth that was so pleasant has become uncontrollable, fiery desire to continue onward.

And now you've reached the top. It's more beautiful than anything you've ever seen before. Your eyes begin to tear with the sheer radiance of it all. You can't believe the colors and the sights you are witnessing. It's as if fifty foot wave washed over your entire body at once, and left you breathless.

You think, it's all downhill from here, and you enjoy the feeling for as long as you can. But when you are ready to leave this wondrous sight, you take one step down and find yourself skiing down the other side of the mountain at an incredible speed. The crisp air is cooling down your moisture -soaked body; it was just what you needed.

Breathing deeply as you ski down the hill, you feel the wind in your hair and in your lungs. The once uncontrollable fire is being slowly cooled down to a warmth again and you smile knowing it was all

worth it. You close your eyes for the last few feet of the hill and let your mind wander; knowing and feeling that all of your senses are tingling.

When you start slowing down, you open your eyes again. Miraculously, you are back in your won bedroom, in your own bed. the sun is just beginning to rise and is casting sunbeams through your window. The birds are singing and the city is awake.

You then feel the coldness of your sheets upon your naked body. Just as you are becoming more fully awake, a manly voice speaks to you.

"Morning, how was it?" the voice inquires, as he cautiously rolls off you.

"Wonderful", you reply with a dreamy smile on your face and kiss him gratefully.

A few moments later while you are lying in his strong arms enjoying the closeness of the moment, he props himself up on a pillow and turns to you.

"Hey babe, let's take a vacation sometime soon...anywhere you want...maybe we'll go skiing."

"Sure, sounds great", you reply but you just know that it could never be the same.



LGS III

Thoughts of a Midnight Jogger

Cool steam escaped with every breath.
My legs carried the burden of
Safely transporting my body
Across the cold dark pavement.

The moon was guardian.
She followed every step
Lighting my path with her watchful eye.
The protective Mother.

My heart fought to break free from its cage
With every beat, every breath.
Its attempts were futile,
It could never escape.

The journey was almost to an end
My lighted porch in the distance, the warmth of home.

Linda Smith-Ribner

A New Wrinkle

"Age gracefully" my Mother said. A cliché from
a book she'd read.

"Bullshit" said I, I'd rather die, than bid
my fading youth good-bye.

Said she, "the mirror doesn't lie."

I made it clear that I was weary, of this
rather time-worn theory.

So, to prove that I was right, perhaps with
just a bit of spite,

I stood before my mirror now, hoping it would
speak somehow.

"Mirror, mirror, hanging there, am I not
yet young and fair, reigning still as 60's
queen, of the 90's singles scene?"

From the wall, there came a voice. It seemed

I had but little choice, to hear the words

it had to say. I tried, but could not run away.

The mirror said, "My God, you're dense, approach
me when you've got more sense.

You look for lies, I'll give you truth, what
you despise, is waning youth.

Within your face I clearly see, a rabid
case of vanity."

Surprised, I said "That isn't me!"

So wishing now to end my plight, I hurled
my brush with boundless might and smashed
that mirror from my sight.

. . . . But, from the pieces on the floor
the mirror said just one thing more.

"Do battle, and you'll lose the fight,..
you know that Mother's always right!"

Buzz Busby

Summerday Sands

voyager of golden coasts,
 he slowly strides along the beach
 bringing love with hungry hopes
 her woods ahead, behind him seas
 lifetimes to know -spanning the hourglass summerday sands

shells on shore like closest friends
 forever changing friendships found
 waving out to sea again,
 an endless search horizon bound
 walking alone—one set of footprints on summerday sands

just as the sunsets due west of the bay
 crossing his path dips a butterfly by
 colorful dancing to music of day
 fluttering sensing the coming of night
 northerly blown—riding the breezes of summerday sands

dusk enshrouds her house of oak
 with warmest welcomes held before
 smiles of her dream near and go
 he firmly knocks upon her door
 anyone home? - carefully hoping for summerday sands

cold rays run through windowpanes
 no chairs, no beds are seen inside
 dinner set for two remains
 as candles softly flicker, die
 nobody's home - black are the nights down on summerday sands
 nobody's home - moments in thought passing summerday sands

© 1990 by Buzz Busby



Rayna Gordon

The Dude in the Red Tuxedo

I stand at my dorm-room mirror in my underwear, pumping iron. My chest looks bigger. Hah! Marko Bogdanovich, little man with a big chest. Rambo the Runt. I study my image. Green eyes, muscular body, fair skin, short dark hair in gelled plumes like the singer Corey Hart wore his back in '84. I'd be handsome if I wasn't the shortest senior at Hunterdon Boy's Academy. Frustrated, I drop my dumbbells and go tinker with my Apple IIe.

"I wish the guys thought of me as more than a computer brainiac." On my radio, Billy Idol is singing "Cradle of Love," reminding me that at seventeen, my first date is only a fantasy.

"I wish I had a girlfriend." I snap off the sound and sit on the edge of my bed, facing the mirror, where cold reality—all five feet, three inches of it—stares me in the eye. "Oh, I wish I was TALLER." I sink into the mattress. "I'd do ANYTHING to grow taller." Lowering my face into my hands, I hear myself mutter, "I'd even sell my soul."

"Good evening," whispers a deep voice. I sit up, and this tall, thin, silver-haired man in a red tuxedo and top hat grins at me, twirling a pomaded handlebar mustache. I sit, rooted to the mattress in motionless panic, heart hammering insanely.

"What are you doing here? Get out right now, or I'm calling a security guard." I'm too scared to move. after all, this

character could be a psycho killer or a thief.

"I'm here to see a lad named Marko Bogdanovich."

"I'm the guy," I stammer out, avoiding his eyes.

"Excellent, Marko," says the dude in the red tuxedo.

"Everyone calls me Bog," I answer.

"A *bog* is a piece of swampland," he says tartly. "I find nicknames asinine. I will call you by the name you've been given."

"O.K., O.K.," I say, trying to maintain an illusion of calmness. "Don't have a meltdown! So, where's the wedding?"

"Wedding?" he laughs again. "I'm not going to a wedding."

What else could it be? Tuxedos, even red ones, remind me of weddings. Weddings remind me of my father's wedding, which was about as much fun as having my teeth cleaned. That wasn't a wedding; it was a real-life horror fantasy. I honestly thought that if one more relative said, "Oh, doesn't little Marko look cute in his tuxedo?" or "How do you like having a mother, again, Marko?" I was going to throw up all over the bridesmaids.

"Then what's with the tuxedo, Dude?"

"It is my standard wearing apparel, and my name is not DUDE. But let's not bother with that now, Marko. We have a deal to make." With these words, he hands me a business card. It's a black card with

red letters, reading L. NATAS, CURATOR OF THE UNDERGROUND.

"The Underground?" I ask. "Is that a museum?"

"Marko, Marko, Marko," he says. "You are so naive."

I look at the name. I wonder what the "L" stands for.

"My job is to alter things for the disheartened," he continues grandly. "Alter the way their lives are going."

"Yeah. Right," I say.

"There is just the matter of a fee."

"I'll play your game—and what is it?"

"We'll discuss that much later, Marko," Mr. Natas says. "Well, I must be going. I'm history." With that, he vanishes.

When I wake up the next morning and get dressed, I find that everything in my footlocker is too short for me. I bet one of my three roommates, this freshman who's a real prankster, has heard me confiding in my best friend Marty Z about my height and shortened my clothes. Of course, maybe I have actually gotten taller, but I doubt it. I unearth my trusty tape measure from the bottom of my footlocker. I stand real straight, hold the tape—five feet, six inches.

I can't believe it. I try again. Five six. In ecstasy, I stroll toward the mirror. I even LOOK somewhat taller.

"Hallelujah. Five foot six. I'm taller."

Marty Z grunts and sits bolt upright.

"Do you mind beginning your growth spurt quietly, Bog?" he says. "It's Sunday and I'm trying to cop some shut-eye. Cut me a break, homeboy."

"Sorry about that, Marty Z," I say. "I'm just so happy."

"Tsokay, Dude," he says. "But don't let it happen again or you're dog

lunch."

"For crying out loud, Martin, I said I was sorry." I go dink around with the computer.

"Hi, Bog." I hear a southern accent. There stands Kid Charlemagne, the coolest senior at Hunterdon. "What's the game?"

"Lawn Mower Madness," I answer.

"Never heard of that," he says.

"Where did you find it?"

"I didn't find it anywhere," I tell him. "I designed it."

"Get outta town," he says. "You have to show me all the neat stuff you can do with that thing."

Who would have thought it? Kid Charlemagne, millionaire's son, handsome hotshot tennis champion from New Orleans. Thomas Charlemagne Gastineau III, who always used to refer to me as "the Digital Dork." Kid Charlemagne and I had been enemies ever since freshman year, when I ratted him out for passing my term paper in as his own, but he's not acting like an enemy now.

So far, two out of my three fantasies have been realized today, and I have a lot of confidence about the third.

"Yo, Bog-Man," says Marty Z. "Tonight's the Fifties Fling at the Gates Academy for Young Ladies. What say? You going?"

"I dunno, Marty Z," I answer. "I don't have anything to wear. Nothing fits." I shake my head and exhibit my shrunken clothes, parading before the guys like a model on a runway.

"Why, Bog," says Kid Charlemagne, "y'all have done some growing."

"Three inches," I say joyously, preening and flexing.

"Sweat it not, Dude," Marty Z tells me. "I have some Fifties-type stuff."

"I may have something," says Kid

Charlemagne.

By the time of the dance, I'm sporting a black leather jacket, a pompadour, and a feeling of extreme confidence. I feel very lucky tonight, until I arrive. Then reality gives me a good swift kick in the heart.

Almost all the girls seem to have dates.

"Go for it, Bogster,:" whispers Marty Z. "Bust a move."

I scan the scene in search of unescorted girls and there, over by the punch bowl, attired in a strapless pink '50's prom dress, is the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. Oh, I've seen beautiful girls before, but this prom queen in pink is not from real life. She looks like some sort of storybook maiden. And she's alone. Falteringly, I move closer.

"Hello," I say hesitantly.

"Hi," the storybook maiden answers sweetly, smiling at me with lips as rosy pink as the strawberry punch she's sipping. I ask her to dance, and she accepts.

"My name is Marko Bogdanovich," I tell her. "I'm a senior at Hunterdon."

"Staci Anne Ziarko," she says. "Sophomore at Gates."

"I room with a guy named Martin Francis Ziarko," I say. "Tall, thin guy, platinum hair, an earring. Are you related?"

"I'm his sister," she says softly, then starts laughing. "lucky for you YOU'RE not my brother. Imagine going through life with a name like Marko Ziarko?"

"That's a fate worse than math finals." I reach out and tentatively caress her long spun-gold-colored ponytail.

"You're a funny guy, Marko," says Marty Z's beautiful kid sister gently, smiling. "I like you."

I feel as if I'm on fire, a melting, tender fire. I'm falling . . . this is nuts. I can't be falling in LOVE. I only met the girl five

minutes ago. All too soon, the dance is over, but not the magic.

"I've really had a great time, Marko," Staci tells me as we stand in the doorway, hand in hand. Our lips unite.

I zip back to Hunterdon like I have springs in the soles of my sneakers. My heart's desires have been fulfilled, at last.

Monday night. Two months later. I'm the last one in the locker room, and I've got the world in a cardboard carton. I'm a whole foot taller, Staci Anne and I have a steady thing going, and I'm point guard for the Hunterdon Hawks. In fact, I've just finished my first practice. My former self never showed the slightest interest in athletics, but he's gone, history, vapor; and the new improved Marko Vladimr Bogdanovich is here to stay. Sore, tired, but feeling victorious, I trudge back to the dorm, my sweaty uniform draped over my arm.

"Hey, look who's here!" catcalls a voice in the hallway. I turn around and there stands this sullen, boneheaded, swarthy hulk named Francisco "the Ramrod" Ramirez, who's in the dorm room next to mine. "It's Brainiac Bogdanovich, and he's been stretched."

Ramirez doesn't seem to like anybody much, but he really has it in for me because he's the one I beat out for the point guard position on the basketball team, and he also used to be Staci Anne's boyfriend.

"Aaahh, contain it, Ramrod," I say through tight teeth.

"First you steal my girl, then you ace me out of a spot on the Hawks," he says. "Now either you quit the team and quit hanging around Staci Anne, or you're gator chow."

I can't believe what I'm hearing. Nobody has ever said that to me before.

"Are you trying to threaten me, Ramirez?" I say in a low angry voice.

"I'm saying, stick to your floppy disks and stay outta my face," he answers, an ugly scowl distorting his features.

"Who do you think you are to tell me what to do, Bucko?" I yell. "Who are you to tell me what sports to play and who my sweetheart should be?"

"Your sweetheart," is his mocking reply. "Your sweetheart didn't know when she had a good thing going. I mean, if she could throw me over for a dork like you, then she doesn't have the brains God gave a tree frog."

I take a deep breath and gather up my self-control.

"You ARE a tree frog, Francisco," I reply icily. "A teen-age mutant ninja tree frog."

The Ramrod laughs, a dark, wicked, Natas-like laugh.

"Hey, Marko," he says. "Nothing has changed just because you got tall and started dating. Once a geek, always a geek."

Something explodes inside me, and before I know what's happening, I haul off and belt Francisco Ramirez right in the mouth, and I'm involved in my first fist fight. A crowd has gathered, and the obese. Silver-haired housefather waddles over to the scene. He drags us to the headmaster's office bodily and tells him about the fight.

The imbecile headmaster doesn't even wait to hear our side of the story. He just slaps both the Ramrod and me with a two-week suspension, calling both our families to bear them the joyous tidings. Next thing I know, I'm on a train back home, and then I slog into my house with feet like lead weights and slam the door behind me. My dad and stepmom glare at me with eyes of sword blades and battery acid. To make a long story short, they put up this big holler about how I let them down, and how I wasn't brought up to brawl like an ape, and I can't wait until my

suspension is over.

"Hiya, Bog," is the first thing Kid Charlemagne says when I return to school, "have y'all got a date for the senior prom?"

"Yes," I answer. "I'm going with Staci Anne Ziarko."

"Y'all mean Marty Z's pretty little blonde sister?" he says. "Impossible. I'm taking her to the prom."

I feel like my heart has crumbled. He's got to be lying. She loves ME.

After classes are over, Staci Anne and I arrange to meet at the Pizza Dish, where all the kids from Gates and Hunterdon hang out, and I pop the question.

"Would like to go to the senior prom with me, Staci Anne?"

"I'm sorry, Marko," she says, "but I'm going with Thomas Gastineau."

"Kid Charlemagne?" I ask. She nods. "But why? I thought we loved each other."

"You're too silly," she answers. I nearly choke on my root beer.

"What do you mean, 'silly'?"

"Exactly what I said. Silly. Getting into fist fights, getting suspended. That's exactly why I broke up with Francisco Ramirez. I thought you were different, Marko. I really thought you were above that, but I see you're not. Thomas Gastineau and I have dated every night while you were suspended."

"Well, thanks a boatload," I say tightly.

"Look, I thought you were a man, but, obviously, I was wrong. You're a kid, Marko. A nice kid, but still a kid. Thomas is a man. He's civilized. He's not one of those immature boys who get their jollies off by acting like Neanderthals."

As I slog back to my dorm on feet of cast iron, the irony of the whole thing hits me like a ton of boulders. When I was

smaller, Staci Anne respected me. Now that I'm six foot three, she thinks of me as a silly little boy, throwing me over for Kid Charlemagne, who's only five eleven. I thought I'd have success with girls if I grew taller, but now I see that physical growth didn't solve anything after all, and as much as I enjoy being tall, I'd gladly go back to my old short stature if I could just have Staci Anne back. I fidget in my wallet and pull out the business card.

"I'll get you for this, Mr. L. Natas, wherever you are."

As soon as the words exit my mouth, he appears before me: red tuxedo, sly grin, and all.

"What are you blaming me for, Marko?" he asks. "You're the one who requested accelerated growth in anatomical stature."

"You were supposed to grant me my heart's desire, and you botched it up," I answer. "You fixed it so the whole works went completely nuclear." I tell him all.

"Well, what did you expect, you foolish adolescent?" he roars, "You didn't think you were going to live happily ever after, did you? This is real life, not a novel of fantasy. Now, about that fee—"

My trembling hand is on my wallet. Natas laughs, that maddening evil mad-scientist laugh.

"It's not that kind of a fee, Marko," he explains.

"What kind of fee is it?" I ask, confused. "Services of some —like a barter-type thing?"

He laughs again.

"Your soul, Marko," he says, his voice a hiss, his eyes sinister laser beams boring into me. "I want your soul."

I almost fall off my chair.

"What do you mean, my soul?" I yell.

"Oh, come now, Marko," he says,

sneering. "Don't you remember swearing up, down, and sideways that you'd sell your soul to have a girlfriend?"—He points a bony forefinger at me as if it's a gun—"to stop being what you call a brainiac?"—He pokes me in the chest, hard—"to be taller?"

My heart is pounding until I think it's going to burst. I force myself to look at the card. NATAS. NATAS spelled backwards is . . . Curator of the UNDERGROUND. Oh, how could I have been so stupid? I've screwed up big-time.

I've gone and sold my soul to the Devil.

"I didn't really mean it. It was a figure of speech," I stammer. "I had no idea something like this could really happen. I thought it was just a myth, just a piece of make-believe that someone made up! I had no way of knowing a person could actually sell his soul to the Devil."

"Tut-tut, Marko." He shoots me in the ribs again with the forefinger gun. "Don't give me that. I am Lucifer Natas, Curator of the Underground, a/k/a SATAN, and I am in the business of buying the souls of poor suckers such as yourself."

"I had no way of knowing," I tell him, my voice cracking. If I had any idea that this sort of thing could really happen, I never would have said that. I never knew a person actually could sell his soul to the Devil." Salt rivers run down my face.

"Oh, please," says Natas in utter disdain. "Spare me."

Yes, I'm a sucker. I got taken for the ride of my life. Satan tempted me by preying upon my most heartfelt fantasies, and I fell for it. I've just been fleeced out of my soul, and believe me, being fleeced out of your soul isn't exactly the same as being fleeced out of fifteen bucks buying paper for your printer.

"I don't even know why you want my soul. I've never done anything really

bad."

"Oh no?" he says, snarling like a beast. "Tell me, Marko, how did the fulfillment of your wishes benefit anyone else?"

"Well, for one thing, it benefited Staci Anne."

"Who benefited from your dating Staci Anne?" he persist.

"Staci Anne?" I ask desperately, feeling hot wetness flow down my leg.

"Don't you smart off to me, MIster Bogdanovich," growls Natas. "What do you think, I just rode into town on a hay truck? I find your deportment APPALLING."

"What did I do?" I ask.

"It's what you don't do. You don't care about anything or anybody."

With his finger, Natas makes a crisscross movement on my left wrist, leaving a red mark shaped like an "X."

"This means that I have purchased your soul."

"Isn't there ANY way I can get it back?" I ask, a feeling of hopelessness crushing me like a boulder. "Any way I can start all over again?"

"No, idiot Marko," he snarls. "You may not start all over again. This is life, not television. There are no repeats."

Sinking into a quicksand of dark thought, I gaze at my left wrist, which is smarting like hell (I'm not surprised). The "X" glares up at me like an evil brand. My battle scar. An angry red reminder of my folly and my fate. I'm so exhausted that I drift into a sleep haunted by the blackest nightmares.

Next morning, I stare into the mirror over my chiffonier as I had done the night this whole mess started. My original self is nowhere to be seen. Instead, I see a tall, trim youth with dark hair, his face stronger than it was two months ago. A soft new mustache graces his lip. His green eyes are solemn.

"You're a fine specimen of physical manhood," I whisper. That last word echoes relentlessly in my brain—manhood.

I had stated three fantasies to the diabolical Mr. Natas, but in reality, I only desired one thing—to be a man. Natas's tirade blares on my mental tape recorder, and I think of myself and the world. Suddenly, I laugh, then cry.

Did I think being a man meant being tall? Did I think being a man meant being somebody's sweetheart? Natas had hit it right on the nose. All my wished had been selfish ones. And now it's too late. There are no second chances, no start-overs. I hear Natas's parting remark echoing in my head. No repeats. No repeats. No repeats. The sky darkens, and so do my spirits. I'm a doomed man. On the way back from classes, I feel the hallway closing in on me. I've got to get out of here FAST. I'm going for a walk.

I walk out of the building and across campus. In the park I hear a dismal moan. Probably a cat or something.

I walk faster, and I hear it again, louder, more intense. That's no cat. The sound is unmistakably human, and it is unmistakably the sound of a human in pain. I walk faster and faster, and I realize that I'm running. Horrified, I see my assumption is correct. Three big, hulking guys are beating up an old guy who is moaning and crying in pain. Pain even *I* can feel.

"His wallet," shouts one of the toughs. "Get his wallet."

"What's going on here?" I yell, sickened and horrified. "What do you think you're doing?" The three brutes laugh at me.

"Nothing that's any concern of yours, butthead," says the biggest one. Fury is a nuclear bomb exploding within me, making me oblivious to the mocking laughter. I punch the slimy creep right in

the mouth. The hoodlums run, but not before I hear the ominous, earsplitting boom. A white-hot sword of pain slashes across my belly, and a sticky wetness soaks my skin and clothes.

A gun, my mind cries hysterically. The big one had a gun.

I'm lying there in mortal agony for what seems eternity. My twenty-four hours are up, I think foggily. I'm done for. Satan is going to come for my soul any minute now.

In the distance, I hear a wail. It's the demons pulling Hell's chariot. Though half-blind with pain and fright, I can make out two figures approaching. The Devil's henchmen, Satan's partners, come to rip my soul from my body and give it to the Master of All Evil. I fling my left arm protectively over my heart and close my eyes tightly, like a small boy warding off a nightmare. I can feel my body being lifted, and no matter how I struggle, I can't break free. My strength is oozing out of me. Satan's partners have a firm grip on me, trying to pry my arm from my chest. My resistance is getting weaker by the second.

They're winning, I think. They're winning. THEY'VE WON. Nice going, Marko, jeers a voice in my mind. You're screwed now.

Not if I can help it. I'm not powerless yet. I clutch my heart again before the Devil's partners have a chance to act, and once more, they try to pry my arm away.

"You got some kind of restraint device I can use?" one of them bellows. "I've gotta give this kid an IV, but he's got his arm locked across his chest and he won't budge it."

Slowly, I open my eyes and realize I'm in an ambulance. The two guys are not Satan's assistants at all, but paramedics hooking me up to a bottle of clear fluid. A sudden black thought swoops like an evil bat into the haunted house that is my mind.

The mark. Oh, my Lord, they've seen the mark. My dark and horrible secret has been exposed. Feeling as naked and scared as a newborn baby, I force myself to glance at my left wrist.

Nothing. There's nothing there. The mark is gone.

The implications of this simple fact bathe my tormented mind in a sunshine-like warmth.

If the mark is gone, that means that the diabolical dude in the reds tuxedo has given me back my soul. He had been lying about not being able to get out of the transaction. After all, Satan is the father of lies.

My entire body goes into a state of limp relaxation, and I'd dimly aware of a voice next to me.

"Thank you much, young feller. You've saved my life."

I turn my head, and there's the old man who was being mugged in the park, also connected to the IV's.

"You don't know it," I answer, managing a weak smile, "but you just saved mine."

Yes, the red mark has disappeared from my wrist, but not from my mind, and not from my heart. Not ever. I won't forget this ordeal if I live to see a hundred and seventeen.

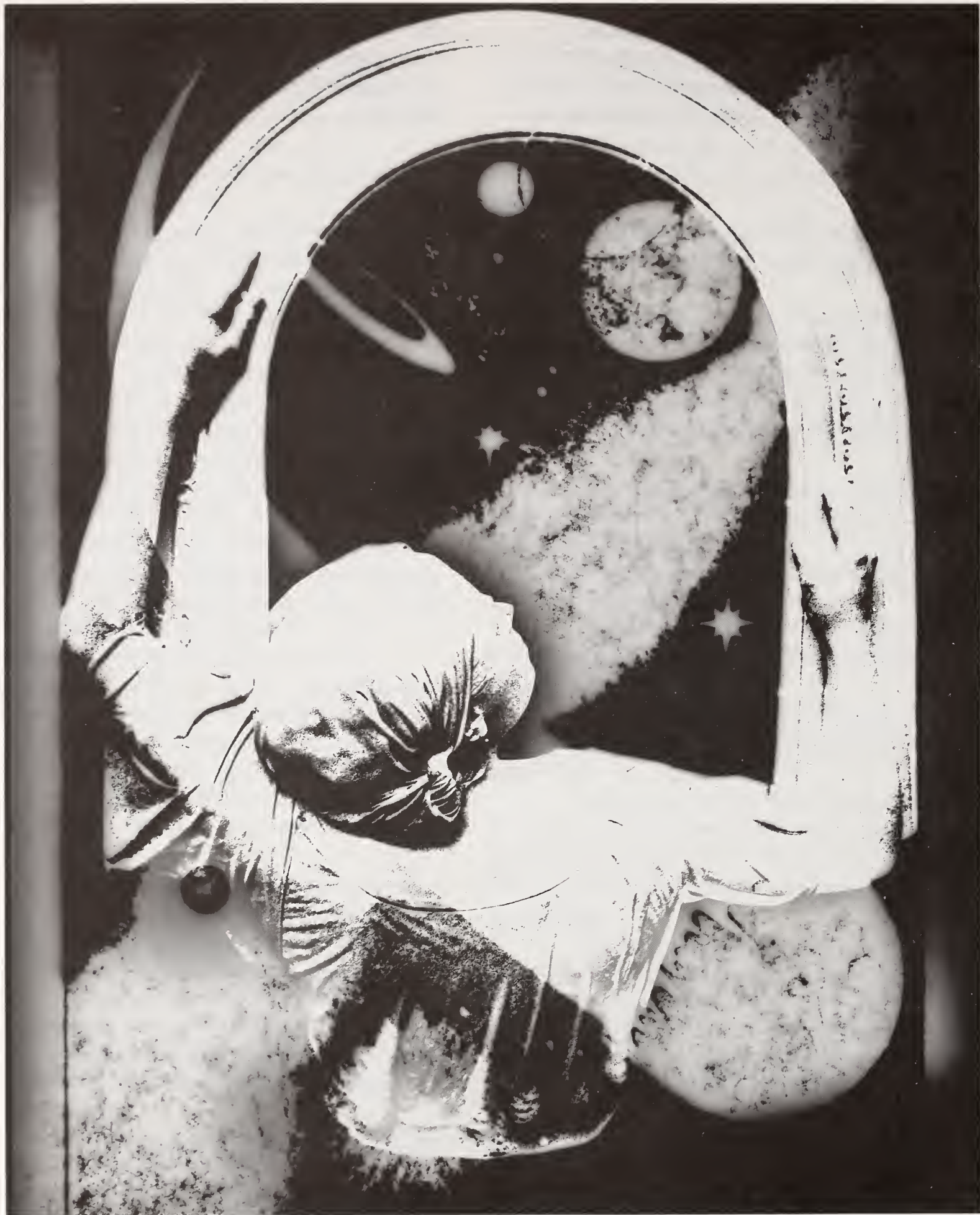
The next morning, in a narrow hospital bed, I glance down at my bandaged body, out of curiosity. No, I haven't shrunk. I get to keep both my soul and my stature, and the funny part is, I don't give a rat's rump. Short, tall, what's the difference?

This experience has been a doorway, an invisible doorway between kidhood and grownuphood, and I have been pushed through it forcibly, obtaining the knowledge of what's really important in the grand scheme of life. It's not an experience I'd care to repeat, but it has served its purpose, for

now I've learned that being a man isn't about how tall you are or how good a lover you are; it's about concern for others and being aware of the fact that you're just one

little component of a much bigger thing called the universe. Yes, I've done a lot of growing in these past few months—and not just taller.





Michele L. Carey

God Finders

so sure they're right
and others are wrong
so adamant and dramatic
is every word

the tighter the eyes
the stronger the vision
the less sense it makes
the stronger the meaning

hands raised as antennas
for maximum reception
hands groping in odd places
for maximum healing

willing to believe
evil in everything
willing to die for
the big picture

if he loves you so
he wouldn't ask
if i could understand
i might believe

Nancy L. Napoli

Bye-Bye Nation

It's a fact! Procrastination
Will be the downfall of our nation.

Time is spent in rumination;
Action stopped by deliberation.

Debating causes of inflation
While people starve. What price nation?

Decisions hinge on remuneration.
Voters register alienation.

Lessons taught for regurgitation.
Wake up! Our schools lack animation.

Why not reverse this situation?
No one agrees; more altercations.

Guns or butter? War's conflagration;
Destruction? Salvation? Predestination?

Luke Sherlock

Eroticism

Her hair flowed like lace in the wind.
Gently it brushed the sandy shore.
The waves steadily attacked the sleeping coast.
Silence, the only sound.
Her eyes hypnotized my emotions.
Her lips slowly melted into mine.

Individual organs throbbed and pumped
at the sensuality of her flesh.
Her warmth, like a blanket,
wrapped around me,
as mine wrapped her.

Trapped internal fires
Now became external flames,
As our enveloped bodies
Performed the bidding
of our brains.

Diana Mancuso

My Quilt and Comforter

Without him, I could live.
His sail has been mended many times.
I weave and sew without a machine,
I am his dependency.

Mine is a rocking chair.
I like the way wood creaks
in cracks and stitches
mend my mind.

He travels into my future
where men search for women
disguised as men.

My past has virtues
unrelated to our distance.
The craft of my hands.

When he returns
He will be cold.
I will cover him with
my woven comforter

of wool purchased
From Europe
Where he forgot
to buy the needles
for my yarn.

Gary Lender

The Day Mary Lost It

I just got back from one of my frequent visits with Mary. I enjoy my visits with Mary. On my first few trips to visit Mary, I had a tedious task getting past the door-man, and now, however, I can breeze right in any old time, especially since the house doctor encourages my visits. He says Mary is very stimulated after I leave. My visits with Mary in her compartment are short. There isn't much conversation: it's mostly one-sided; Mary doesn't talk much these days.

Mary is always the same when I arrive. she is sitting in her rubberized compartment, arms folded neatly around her, as she gazes at the dust particles dancing in the sunbeams streaking through the uncurtained window. As I leave her I wonder what she does on cloudy days, when there isn't any sunlight. Of course, I only visit on sunny days. I'm proud that I was able to aid Mary so she could live in that impressive-looking building with its excellent security system. Well, enough of my bragging about myself. Let me tell you how I was able to aid Mary.

I worked in the machine shop in the cigar factory, and Mary was a foreman over the department next to the shop. My foreman, Myron, was going on vacation and, as a courtesy to Mary, he jokingly asked her to keep an eye on the boys while he was away. The boys he meant was me, old Ed, timid Mike, and Pat. He knew that

he didn't have to worry about us, but he wanted to make her feel important; as if she needed an ego boost!

She was the biggest pain where the sun don't shine ever assembled. At first glance you knew she was a she-demon on stilts. She wore her hair pulled up in a tight bun that looked like a cake of Gouda cheese. Her bright pink uniform always neatly pressed. Oh! I forgot, she also had a pencil stuck through that bun of hers like an old maid school marm. Come to think of it, she should have been one of those. She fit the part all right. She always had her nose where it didn't belong most of the time, and up the big boss' butt all the time. An A-1 squealer! Well, that was Mary.

The first day Myron was away Mary did all she could to keep an eye on us. Every ten minutes you could see old turkey face peering through the narrow window of the shop door. We got tired of the constant surveillance. Pat wanted to moon her. I wanted to punch her, but old Ed said, "Cover up the window, fellers, that will drive her nuts." We did, but it only made things worse. Old Mary would stick her head in and peer at us like a nun who had just caught her students looking at a Playboy magazine. Then, she had the nerve to check our work. Bleep her! I thought, I'm gonna get her!

I thought of a great plan. When I told the fellows about it, old Ed laughed.

He laughed all the time anyhow; timid Mike was his usual self: timid. Pat said "ALL RIGHT!" I then explained my plan to a very very good friend of mine who worked in Mary's department. She also happened to be in a perfect position to make the plan work.

It didn't take long to set the trap for old Mary. A lady from the floor outside the shop stuck her head in and told me Phebe (my friend) wanted to see me. I went to see her right away. She told me, "Now's the time. The bosses went to the other building."

"This is perfect," I said. "That will give me the time we'll need, if only old Mary will cooperate." I told Phebe thanks and patted her bottom. She smiled her little smirk of approval and raised an eyebrow. Oh, that's another story, never mind that part!

I hurried back to the shop hoping scary Mary would follow; she did. When Mary opened the door and poked her head inside, she was bombed with a bucket of cold water. BULL'S EYE! Right on top of that damned bun. We all busted out laughing; even timid Mike had tears in his eyes. Mary, the aristocrat she was, straightened up and proclaimed: "I'll have you jobs for this!!!" as water dripped from the pencil sticking out of her bun.

She took off half running to find help to right the wrong she had been done. The four of us sprang into action on Phase II of my plan. We cleaned up the water that missed her. We then dried the area with electric blowers (space heaters) to evaporate the last drop of evidence. We waited for Phase III.

The door jerked open. George, the assistant plant manager, came in first. He looked at everyone; then he went to timid

Mike and asked what happened to Mary. Mike played his part perfectly. He just shrugged his shoulders and mumbled "I don't know." Vintage Mike, I thought.

George went to old Ed and asked the same question. Old Ed said laughing, "How the hell do I know? It wasn't my turn to watch her."

George, really pissed, turned to me and Pat. "What do you have to say for yourselves?" he barked. Before we could answer old Mary, Mr. Paul, the plant manager, came in. Mary's mouth was sounding off like a drill sergeant telling and showing where the terrible thing had happened. Everyone looked to where she was pointing; then we looked at Mary, still dripping. I saw my opportunity.

I half whispered, "You know, George, she's been under a lot of stress. Do you think she flipped her wig or something? There ain't no water there. Especially a bucket as she says."

Mr. Paul and George looked at the floor again then at one another. They both gave Mary a patronizing look. They each took one of her arms and led her out of the shop telling her she might need a rest. Old Mary wasn't too happy about what happened; as a matter of fact, she didn't even want to go for the limousine ride Mr. Paul arranged for her. You know, one of those special ones. The ones that have two drivers that wear white suit coats.

Well, that's how Mary came to live in that very impressive building. Thanks to me. Come to think of it, old Mary could use a roommate. I know this English Literature professor at Broward Community College. She just loves poetry. I bet Mary would love to have someone to read poetry to her. Now, if I can only think of a plan . . .



Carolina Dills

Laundromat—Saturday

I see a woman my age but older
 Doing things with clean clothes.
 I remember I know her. Priscilla.
 Priscilla with downcast eyes, chapped hands.
 . . .Vegetable man's daughter. . .Immaculate Mary School.

Memory walks me back to parochial school to
 Priscilla to whom it was imperative to step on
 e-v-e-r-y crack that separated black tiles from white
 tiles in the linoleum checkerboard that led down the
 hall to the lunchroom. In the lavatory kids snickered;
 Priscilla hogged the washstand . . .for hours of minutes
 , , ,she washed her hands.

Today Priscilla washes clothes; forces fabric into shapes
 Dry hands demand a stiff crease in Levis.
 Fantasies folded inside Vogue and Gardens
 . . .outdated issues. Wishes she'd never allow.
 Table top collage of 20-Mule Team, Purex and Niagara,
 Grocery store matches, Tarreyton's. .worn bag of laundry coins.

Production line, her table is.
 Underwear rolled. . .not folded. .yes, "rolled."
 Fruit of the Loom, like small sleeping bags rolled.
 Are next to a row, equal in length, of rayon panties.
 Folded in thirds. . .neck holes aligned. . .tee sleeves tucked in,
 Look straight from the package, only cardboard's removed.

Towels in half. . .left to center. . .right tucked in.
 Her lips move — I see her chanting.
 1-2-3 stack. . .fold & stack. . .1-2-3- stack.
 In threes, the towels; in threes, the words.
 Versed in Immaculate Mary Elementary mentality,
 The chant seems clear:
 Father. . .Son. . .Holy Ghost
 Faith. . .Hope. . .Charity
 Jesus. . .Mary. . .Joseph!

What bad-weather thoughts haunt her?
 Will her life so rigid stay
 Or will she allow soft cloth to unfold?

Avril D. Harris

David

I am the cheese
 I stand alone
 With the soft voice
 voice
 echo
 echoing

I am the cheese.
 The rat
 The puppet master, Time is
 not my mother.
 She holds the key
 of my body to which
 I am sole heir to my own soulless
 damned
 solitude.
 She has mapped out my legacy
 She tells me what I want to do.
 Mater you have such a kind heart.
 Such a kind smile.
 Let fall your false visage
 ta facade dangereuse
 Je veux voir ton vrai
 visage.
 I am tired
 I want to hold my destiny
 now. Give it back.
 Let me dance arm in arm in
 arm.
 With ambiguous Time.
 He shall turn his back
 on me,
 it is a far more pleasant delusion than
 your caress.
 Let me hold my decided destiny.
 Mother, Mother dearest silk.
 Moth eaten.
 You crumble before time
 your power is self defeating.
 Myself.
 I hide behind time
 I have no courage.
 You hold it all in your hands.
 and the echo,
 and the chant goes
 on.
 I am the cheese.
 You have decided my future.

Sean Patrick Heikkinen

Replicant Lover

Take it, take it, come and take it.
Bullet riddle, have a little,
Just a little taste.

Metallic salty, knees go faulty,
Asphalt to My face.
Come on baby, Drink me!
Arms around my waist.

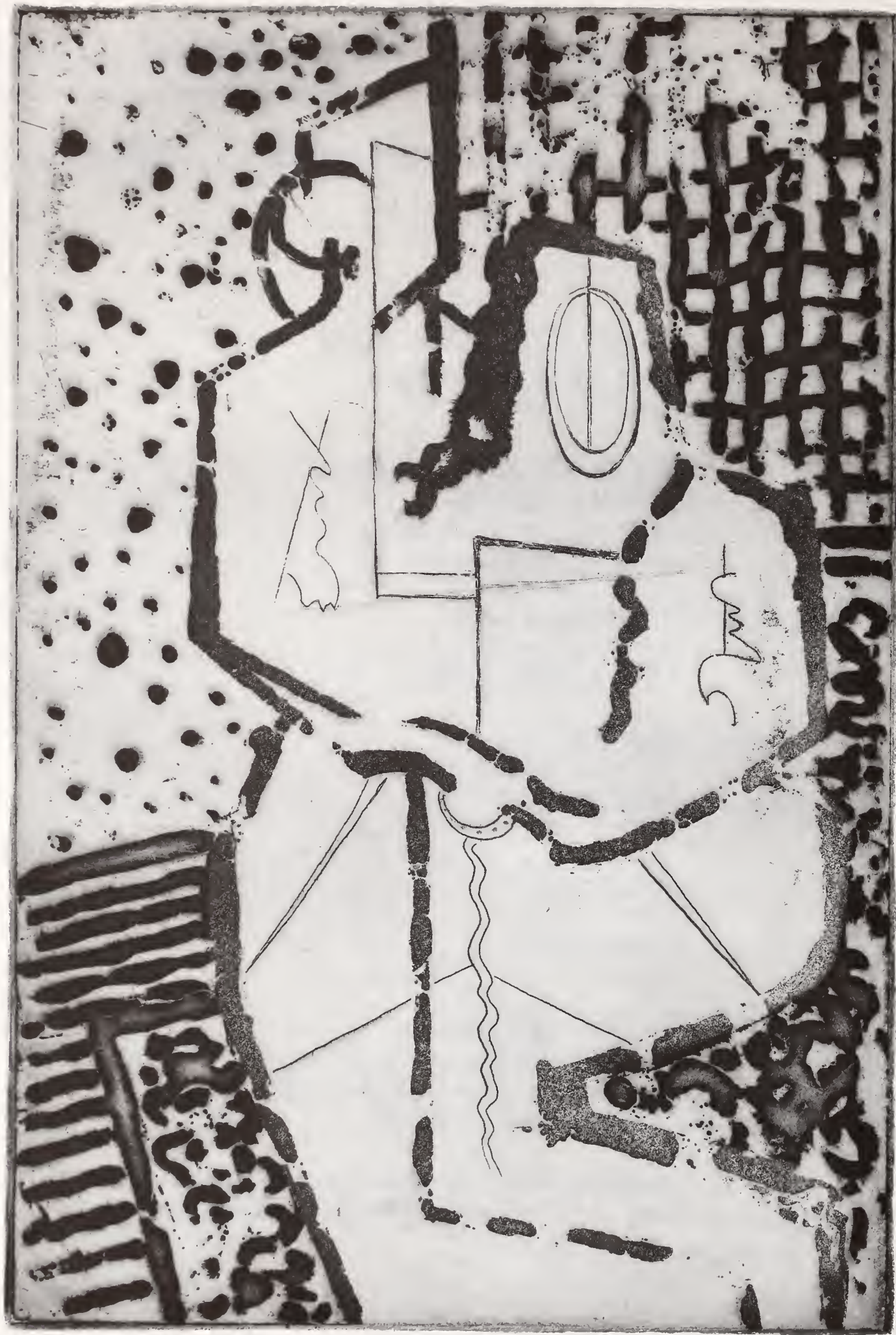
This stuff that flows,
with life, so sweet.
I shed in wanton haste.

Numbing, soft black,
seeping through a crack.
Incubi shrewd and wry,
grope to hold me back.

Bog of corpses,
sinking down.
Cackling skull,
intestine crown.

Wake me baby, wake me.
Please try to bring me 'round.
Before they come and take my soul,
in stealth without a sound.

Here I lie so tiny, crumpled in your painful touch.
I see I gave you what I mean to, I think you took too much.





Diane Madio

An Interview with Richard Grayson

Richard Grayson was born in Brooklyn, New York. He has a BA in political science and an MFA in creative writing from Brooklyn College. He also has an MA in English from the College of Staten Island. Richard has taught English at BCC, both full and part-time, since 1980. Over 165 of his short stories have been published in many journals across the country, and he has published seven books of fiction, including *With Hitler In New York*, *Lincoln's Doctor's Dog*, *I Break For Delmore Schwartz*, *Eating At Arby's*, and *Narcissism And Me*. Richard has twice won the individual artist grant from The Florida Arts Council, has been part of many workshops and seminars throughout the country, and has frequently received fellowships from writers' colonies. He has recently been accepted into the School Of Law at the University of Florida.



What attracted you to writing?

It seems like it's something I always remember being interested in from when I was very young. I don't remember a time really when I wasn't writing. When I was two years old, my mother found me writing words. The first word she found me writing was "Tide" because I had seen it on a TV commercial. I basically sort of taught myself how to write and read, and I always wanted to write.

I've read a couple of your books, and it seems that you're a satirist. You tend to make serious statements in a comical way.

I think a lot of what I write is comic. A lot of serious things can be said in a comic way. What kind of writer I am--I'd rather not limit myself because someday I might want to write romance novels. I need the money.

How do you feel about writing programs around the country on both the undergraduate and graduate levels?

When I was an undergraduate student I took a couple of courses in creative writing. I have an MFA in creative writing which is the standard degree that everybody seems to have these days. I think there's a lot wrong with writing programs, and one of the things is that I think they're responsible for a lack of vitality in a lot of books published by younger writers. There seems to be a lot of well-crafted but emotionally empty stories that I see. The kind of stories that I read a lot in the New Yorker. I see their pictures in the B. Dalton's in Manhattan and a lot of them have a sameness to them. They're sort of not interesting to me. On the other hand, I think the virtue of great writing programs is that they allow you to be in a community of writers, to take

yourself seriously as a writer, and give you time to write. It gives you a year or two in which your main occupation I suppose is to be a writer and to think about writing and take it seriously. So, I think in that way they're very helpful. It depends on teachers, and it depends on whom you're within the class.

What do you do when you can't get the words down? What are some of the things you go through?

I don't write, and I've had long periods where I don't write fiction. I write everyday, but I write in a journal so that doesn't count. I have not written much fiction over the last couple of years. I've been writing more non-fiction; humor pieces, newspaper columns, magazine articles, memoirish pieces--they're not that much more different from some of my fiction. But it doesn't bother me.

Is getting published as important to you as you mature as a writer?

No, it isn't. I think it was very important when I was younger and when I was still a graduate student and when I was starting out in the mid to late seventies. I would send out stories to little magazines and get a lot of acceptances. It seemed to validate to me that I was a writer. Now I sort of believe that I'm a writer whether I'm published or not. Everyone wants, I suppose, the biggest audience possible, but I don't agonize over it. I'm not like some people who complain a lot. And the most famous writers I know complain a lot.

You've said that writing has been the primary way you've defined yourself, that you see the writer's job as giving the lowdown on himself to humanity. The first

time I read that I thought, well, maybe he's writing as a means of therapy for himself.

Right. Could be. I think a lot of writers do that. Maybe I'm just honest about it. Or I did that more when I was younger.

A lot of stories I've read involve aunts, uncles, friends--it seems close-knit. Are these actual people who gave you ideas for writing, or is it meant to be fictitious...

Or both. Clearly some of the things are based on real people and real experiences but probably less than you would think. Probably one of the tricks that I had was--almost like a false confession--trying to get the reader to believe things were true when they weren't. It's sort of teasing.

Some of them sounded very sincere, do you think you came across as sincere? Does it lend to the believability of your stories?

I guess so. I've written stories that are obviously based on real things that have happened to me or other people, and I'm sure every writer does. But real life is never as good as the fiction. It never works out as neatly. But sometimes real life works out much more neatly. It's heightened reality. That's why I think a lot of writers have said that fiction is more true than non-fiction. It's kind of emotionally true. Even when I talk about writing autobiographical, memoirish stuff, you can choose what you write about and by choosing not to write about certain things or give certain facts then you're automatically shading it. You could, for instance, take people's autobiographies and put them in the fiction section. A friend of mine's father wrote an autobiography, a famous conductor. It was about 800 pages and he never mentioned that he had five children

in his life. It may not have been important in his life, but, in a way, that's kind of fictional. And it showed what kind of father he was, too.

Do you think you would be taken more seriously if your style had a more serious tone?

Oh yeah, yeah. That's true I think in any kind of field where people make judgments about what is serious or not. For instance, why you rarely see comedies nominated for academy awards. Humor is somehow a lesser genre than something that's highly serious especially among people who are literary critics. They're not known for their sense of humor. A lot of people are very pretentious in the literary world, and pompous.

Critics have said a lot of things about you. A lot of them have been positive, but they have also said things like, "He sounds like a stand-up comedian" or "Grayson takes real events and adds a twist...the fruits of his labor are admittedly weird," or, from a particularly strong criticism "A cornucopia of crap." How do you feel about all of this? Do you think sometimes you may encourage this negative response?

You mean by provoking it?

Yes.

Yeah, I suppose so. That one review that called it a "cornucopia of crap" I was very proud of. The reviewer thought it was the worst book he had ever read in his life. I would think, gee, to make somebody that upset. And he was so upset. It was clearly like it was one of the worst reviews I had ever read in my life. And clearly I must have touched a nerve. Because usually with

a bad book, you just throw it away. I get through very few fiction books that I start. Mostly I don't get mad at them I just sort of say, "Okay, this is page 45 and I'm going to stop here because I don't have time; I'm not really interested." But he got really pissed off at whatever I was doing. On the other hand, I also think that, you know, I've very rarely heard other writers admit this, but I have learned things from negative criticism in publications. For instance, I didn't realize how "cute" I was 'til I started reading it and then I said "you have to tone down the cute." So, I think that if you're open...It's embarrassing to see that in the newspaper, I suppose. The bad review appeared in Minneapolis, and I don't know anyone in Minneapolis. My publisher sent it to me. But that's part of it. That's part of being published. I tell students even here at BCC when we do a workshop. Even if we're doing freshman composition and we're sharing each other's work and somebody says something about it, it's not necessarily harmful; it's helpful. If you're not aware of your faults, there aren't too many people who are going to tell you. Your friends probably aren't going to tell you; your mother is probably not going to tell you. Not about writing, anyway. She will tell you about your other faults, not hanging up towels or something.

You've brought up the subject of your students. You've taught in NYC and, of course, here at BCC. First, what draws you to teaching, coming in and out of the profession, and what kinds of things do you see in young writers as far as their abilities or weaknesses?

It's standard knowledge that there's sort of been a decline in the last 20 years or so. My friends and I sometimes say we got some of the last good public school educations,

specifically in NYC having graduated high school in 1968. About two years later, things started to decline. We went through really rigorous stuff. We had to write research papers, for instance, that my BCC students wouldn't be able to; we had to write those kinds of papers in 9th grade. I don't think it's that we were any more intelligent as a group, although I was in the honors or gifted program. Generally I think it's that, for whatever reasons, there's a lot of competition for people's time. People don't read that much and students don't write that much.

I do like teaching. There is this world of what we call in the English departments of America--text, as opposed to watching things on a video screen or listening to them over a tape recorder. I like sharing stuff. Sometimes I'm home and I'll be reading something. I'll say, "Oh, gee, that's really an interesting book or article, even a phrase, and boy I would like to share that with someone." I guess that's part of being a writer. Most writers who are fiction writers and poets are teachers also. It's a way to make a living and not necessarily have a full-time job, but it's also very comfortable. I've taught other things besides English. I've taught computer education to public school teachers. The other things I could do as a writer, and I know a lot of the writers at this campus [South] do it, is explain when I'm discussing the writing process with students I can point to examples of problems that I've had. I'll very often see something in a paper, and I'll say, "Yeah, you know I used to do something like that." I think that's helpful to students. Rather than just looking at a paper and saying this is wrong and that's wrong, you have empathy with them. It really doesn't get easier. In a sense it does. I try sometimes to do the assignments that I assign my students. It's easier for me to do

them than it is for my students. On the other hand, my own writing assignments that I gave myself aren't easy.

A lot of people say you can't separate art from the individual. Do you see yourself as Richard Grayson, or Richard Grayson the writer?

There are a lot of people who don't know that I'm a writer whom I've had contact with. When I used to teach in the Dade county Public Schools, I used to do teacher training and education. I worked very closely with people. Nobody had any idea I was a writer. A lot of people in my life don't care whether I'm a writer or not. I don't think that matters. On the other hand, to me, inside it matters to some degree. I don't think being a writer or artist or anything else gives you license to be mean or to get in front of somebody in line at Publix.

Let's talk about your political involvements. For example, in 1980 you ran for president on a platform advocating legalized dueling, hereditary titles for Americans, gasoline allocation via a "Bowling for Gallons" TV show. You have been seen in NYC holding a sign that read "Save the Donald." Recently, you participated in the Radio-Free Broward Movement in an effort to send Two-Live Crew tapes to people in South Florida. Why do you do these sorts of things? Do they have any effect on your writing at all?

I've gotten stuff out of all of those things. I've written articles about doing all of those things for newspapers or magazines. But all of them have been in some way a continuation of satire and political commentary. I don't have a regular forum. It's hard to get stuff into the news media. I came across the

idea in NYC of writing press releases that got people's attention. For instance, I had a fan club for my grandparents, "The Ethyl and Herbert Sarrett International Fan Club" which got on the radio and nationwide TV and stuff like that. In a sense, it always comes from writing, even if these things aren't published. They start with the idea of writing. When I had a column in the Hollywood Sun-Tattler, I used to be able to do stuff in the column without actually having to go out and make a fool of myself. There's a lot of people who do this. We get a lot of messages across the mass media and basically what I see myself doing is sort of like interfering with that message. When people see me on CNN being the editor of a magazine called Pauper which was supposedly a magazine that glamorized people in poverty, maybe it makes people think. After, they say, "Oh, that's funny." It certainly has made me question what you see in the media. One of the things I've learned is that basically, reporters, even on major newspapers, are very lazy. Most people read the newspaper, watch ABC, CBS, NBC, or CNN, and think well things are happening. Well, yes. I mean the Gulf War was happening, they were reporting... But I mean this other thing that makes up 75% of what a newspaper is--it gets in there because people get it in. Whether they're public relations people, or individuals, or somebody promoting something, and you realize how you can manipulate the media, in some ways it's frightening.

NYC versus South Florida. You've written numerous short stories about New York and South Florida. I've read *Eating at Arby's*, and I think that it's hilarious, but a lot of it hit home. There was an episode in there about the widespread use of cocaine down here.

That book is almost ten years old.

That's what I thought was frightening. Because that long ago it was going on and look at the state of things now. What made you write the book in that vein?

It's basically like the Dick and Jane books, first grade primer. It came to me that this would be a way to sort of express angry feelings about my environment in a way that was sort of non-threatening rather than ranting and raving. I wrote this book under a grant from the Florida Arts Council, and if you notice, on every page there's a reference to the sunny Florida weather. It gets so bizarre that it gets sunny at night. Somebody said the book is a very angry book. But it's just masked in benignity which is part of what I saw around me. I have not looked at that book in years, but the line I remember is about when they're in the Broward Mall and they talk about a book store, you could buy books there as if books are in line with bug spray or designer jeans, and this kind of idiotic environment that we're in, which I think is not unique to South Florida. In fact, I think it's taken all over. You see this environment now on the streets of Manhattan, where I live part of the time. Today there was a story in the New York Times saying that you can't see art films in Manhattan anymore because basically all of the new theatres are like the suburban six and seven plexes, and they all play the same movies. So where do you go? This "arbyzation" of the world. Everything is kind of plastic. Some people were offended by the book. Miami magazine, in an otherwise nice piece about me, didn't like it. People, especially in Miami, who were at this point, 1982, trying to make Miami's image as a cultural place. They thought I was showing them out to be idiots and that wasn't true. I think this is one of the more

sophisticated, more cosmopolitan places in the United States. There are a lot of good places to live, but there are a lot of places worse than South Florida.

Do you prefer Manhattan to South Florida?

It's different. I don't think I'd want to live in Manhattan all year. It has advantages. Being able to walk, I can walk on Broadway and see life as it's lived, rather than having to go into a car and not see too much. You can see a lot of horrible things of life, like the people who live on the streets. I always say if I stay in South Florida too long, I forget what urine smells like. I mean, that's not pleasant.

Is one easier to satirize than the other?

No, I think you can satirize any place. I grew up in a part of Brooklyn that was middle class and not very interesting. There were a lot of people in the neighborhood in Manhattan that has a very high percentage of writers, actors, musicians, soap opera stars, famous people whom you see all the time. That's kind of funny, too, because people are so full of themselves.

Narcissistic?

Yeah, sure.

What are your feelings about censorship, since you were so interested in the Two-Live Crew episode?

Obviously, I'm opposed to censorship. Basically, I'm a First Amendment absolutist. I was on a panel at Miami-Dade Community College six years ago. It was on censorship. I argued that maybe we need a little bit of censorship so that people would take writing seriously. But you notice that very

little of the censorship has been about writing. Because, let's face it, the people know that very few people read books these days. So, you could just about say anything in a book. For instance, if you publish Two-Live Crew lyrics in a book of poetry or put it in a small press, no one would notice it.

Has any of your work been censored?

Not that I know of. Philip Roth said about Eastern Europe when it was under communism that, "there, nothing is permitted, so everything is important. Here everything is permitted, so nothing is important." American writers, unless they've come from Cuba, Czechoslovakia, or China, have no idea how bad it is in parts of the world. There are many writers, over a thousand, in prison around the world not for committing murder or anything, but for things they have written, from China and the Middle East (including Israel), to Europe, Africa, and certainly Latin America.

It seems satire is a good way of dealing with censorship.

That's the trouble that a lot of students have with satire. A lot of the satire that I see in campus publications, all over, the kind of stuff I wrote when I was in college is too broad and too heavy handed. You have to be very careful in doing that. It shouldn't be a blunt instrument; you have to have a little finesse.

I hear that you plan on going to law school in Tallahassee in the fall.

Yeah, I've been admitted, so I think I'll probably go.

Why are you interested in law, and how does it fit in with your writing and teaching

background?

I wanted to go to law school in college and then I started getting interested in writing and I decided to go for my Master's in English to get more of a literary background because I wasn't an English major and then I went into a creative writing program. I'm basically interested in law on an intellectual level. I'm an education junkie. I take courses. I have so many credits. Right now, I'm taking a course at FAU on food and nutrition only because it's a subject that interests me. I just think it will be interesting. I think it will be an interesting experience. I think I've taught English long enough.

Do you plan to continue writing?

I don't know that I'll have time right away, but I certainly write in my journal everyday. Friends of mine who are lawyers and also write say that they probably have more time than I do when I'm teaching full-time at BCC and have papers to grade. That's one of the problems with teaching writing is that you're always involved with writing. I'm trying not to insult any students, but sometimes when you read writing of beginning people or people who don't really want to be writing, don't know too much about writing, you read a lot of unskilled writing. Sometimes I find I start writing like that myself. I find myself making the spelling errors that I see very often on student papers. Sometimes, after reading a batch of papers, I can't write. I don't know, I'm very suggestible. Sometimes I'll read good writing and it will spur me on to write and read writing that's not so good and I almost forget how to write. I know that from my own journal, for example, if I go from marking a group of remedial papers and some of them are not

bad, but often I'll go into my journal and start writing simple sentences. The style sort of floods itself into mine. So I don't know what effects reading law books will have on me. But there are always good things. You could always get an antidote. Sometimes, before I sit down to write, I'll read something. If I'm working on a long piece I don't want to read a strong voice because then I'll just get too carried away with it. A lot of writers, when they're writing fiction, don't read fiction. Right now I'm reading John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest*, and I know that while I'm reading it I wouldn't want to be writing anything because I'm so admiring of what he's doing there that I would mimic it consciously or unconsciously.

Do you think good writers are created or do they have innate talent?

I think that most people can be brought to a certain level of competence so that you can become a clear writer. A lot of people think they can be writers. That's why you get no respect as a writer: as you meet somebody at a party and they say what do you do and you say that you're a writer and they say, "Oh, yeah, my eight year old niece likes to write." There's not much difference in some respects between what my English 1101 student is to me. John Updike is probably capable of writing like an 1101 student on his bad days; I know I sure am. I write a lot worse than my students sometimes. Most of the people who have Master's degrees in creative writing are working in other fields. I don't think that they necessarily wasted their time. It gives you an appreciation of literature. If I stopped writing fiction or literary non-fiction or anything tomorrow, I wouldn't think I'd wasted my time, even if I hadn't gotten published.

What advice would you give to writers today?

Write, write, write. There's something that I have written down, that I wrote when I was eighteen years old; it's from a Greek and I can't remember the name. He said, "If you wish to be a writer, write." You'll improve on your own actually. I started writing a journal when I was eighteen and I keep it up. At least I feel like I'm doing something even if I'm not writing.

Is that one of the reasons why they have this journal-writing movement in the middle and secondary schools? Is it to keep students in touch with writing or to give them confidence?

I got a grant to be a writer in residence in Rockland County, New York, a couple of years ago, and I was working with little kids, second, third fourth, fifth grade. They're taught to write differently. To appreciate what they write and they're not told to worry about the writing process. In kindergarten now they write; they may be writing not even letters but symbols or they're writing horribly misspelled work, but you're not supposed to say, "You spelled this wrong," you're supposed to say, "Oh, this is wonderful," and it is. Many of us were taught to write the wrong way. We were taught to write as corrections.

In class today, we were talking about getting papers back and what you do with them, and one student said you can see what you did wrong. I said isn't it funny you never see what you did right? I try to remember to tell students on papers, "You know I like the way you did this specific thing," so they can learn from something they did very skillfully if it's brought to your attention.

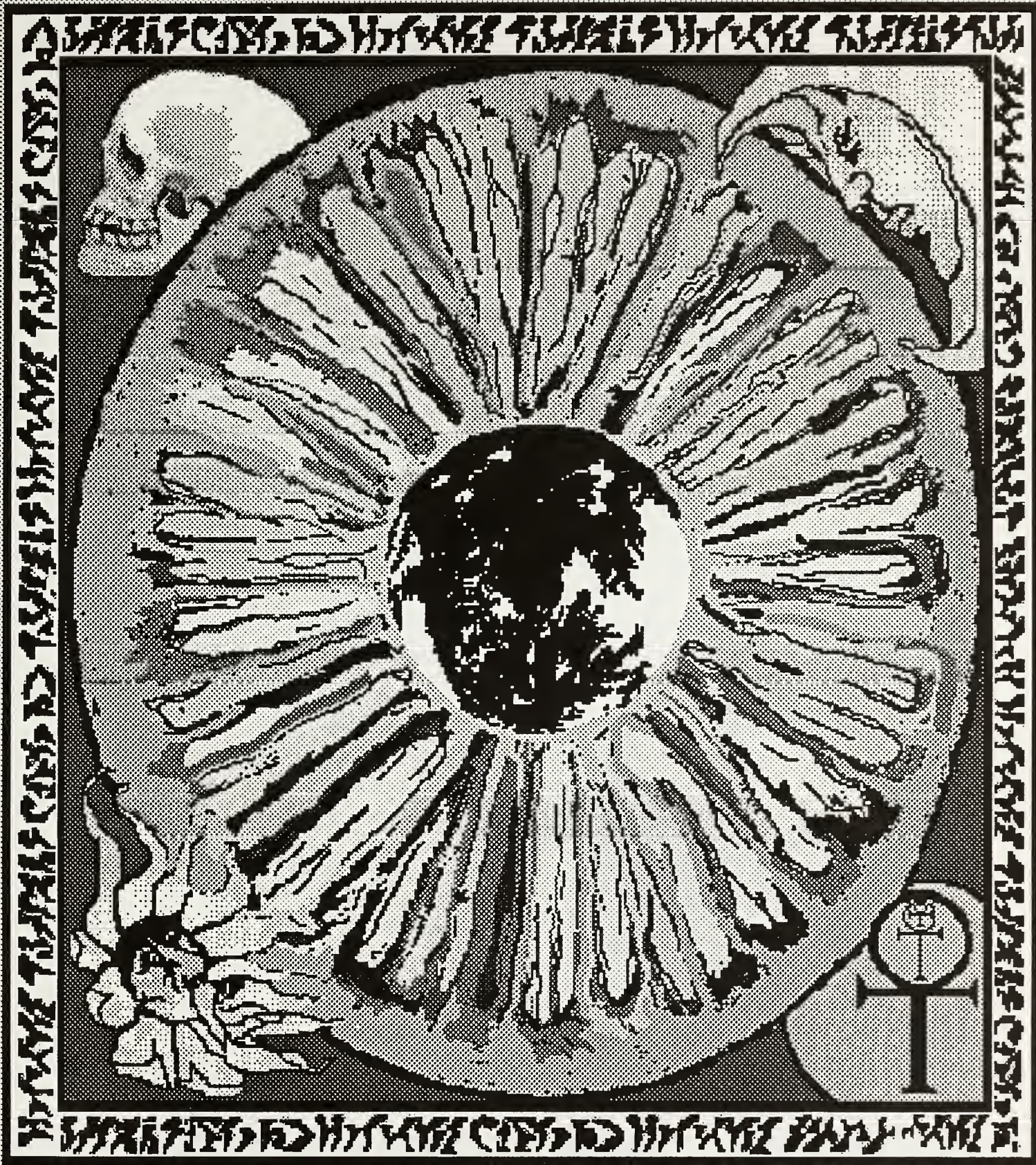
I think people hate to write because

they know exactly how their papers are going to look like when they come back. The bleeding papers. Maybe you want to do that in college, but I don't think you want to get kids started off thinking about writing. I've gotten brilliant stories from second graders. So there's hope! I think maybe that if this filters up, by the time these kids get to college they'll have a different attitude toward writing than some people have. I've seen some people who've somehow gotten through the educational system and still have an enjoyment of writing and see it as something pleasureable, something to make discoveries, something to express yourself.

What does the future hold for Richard Grayson?

I think I'm going to have dinner now. Tomorrow I have to prepare a class and next week is spring break! If you plan things, I mean, most of my books I believe without exception happened because people came to me. I've never been able to go to a publisher blind and submit something. All the publishers got to me by seeing my work in others places and wrote query letters to me. So while I'm aggressive in sending things out, sometimes things just happen.







Marc McNulty

Stone in a Meadow

Standing like some forgotten tomb, a stone
Parched by the sun and draped in moss
The inscription is no longer visible
The date is of no importance
Only a resting soul resides here
Without even a breath of sorrow

Rain returns life to the meadow
A saint or pauper could be sleeping, no matter
Only a tireless soul alone under a stone
No lover comes to lay flowers
No thought even to remember this soul
Imprisoned beneath the sky

Waking from the night is the meadow, dripping dew
Light rises drying with its tender touch
A single stone blends into the terrain
Passersby are blind to its existence
A name is gone but the soul still lingers
Lingering on the hope of some fresh red flowers.

T. F. Milam

The Green Forest

The green Forest
A place where Nature
Decides to survive.

The trees sigh . . .
The grass wave . . .
This land is alive.

Sublight plays catch-me-if-you-can
With leaves and butterflies.
Birds are singing, showing they are wise.

The wind swims through the evergreen
Of towering pines and their needles.

Flies, shining green and blue in the sun,
Dance with each other all day.

With all of them knowing
That this is the way.



Penelope Haller Hyman

Never Ninety

If it were 1921 again,
I'd sit upon our scarred wood porch and watch
Great ships steam by. I'd smell new grass and hear
The crickets cry, waiting for night to come.

It used to be when you got old, you died.
To live, for ten years now, three days a week
Vampire machines suck in, pump out my blood.

Death torments me constantly. I know his
Smell: old flowers, hospitals and dust. Each
Day, more weak, I struggle, but now he's won.
I choose, no more machines. I choose, the end.

Soon, I'll sit upon our scarred wood porch and
Watch great ships steam by. I'll smell new grass, hear
The crickets cry. Waiting for night to come.

Peter Sanger

The Four O'Clock Rendezvous

It was clockwork as usual
 As father time struck four.
 Separating glass opens up my mind.
 There she was
 Scintillating
 Under the luminous beams of light
 Like a swarm of fireflies in the night forest.
 So sleek and serene,
 Holding her cylindrical posture
 In bold and beautiful fashion.
 I admire her ingredients
 Which instigates our confrontation.
 So colorfully dressed
 With an array of different flavors
 To complement her effervescent personality.
 My fatigued body
 Thirsts for her offspring
 Which longs for her unique taste.
 I grab her gently
 As my hand feels her cold perspiration
 Trickling down her body.
 My imagination
 Starts to fill with infatuated dreams
 As she becomes more voluptuous in my mind.
 My mouth slowly opens as lips touch.
 A faint aftertaste is left in remembrance of her.
 That memory will not be forever lasting,
 But tides over my desire
 Until we meet again at the four o'clock rendezvous.

Christopher R. Vesely

Courtship Rituals

"YOU WANT WHAT!"

The young man winced as I shouted my disbelief in his face. He drew in a deep, steadying breath and repeated himself. "I want to fuck your daughter."

It was incredible. Here he was, actually asking my permission to perform an act with my daughter—my little girl—that I wouldn't feel comfortable with had they been married! The balls this kid had!

I looked him over one more time. He was a good-looking kid: carefully trimmed, short black hair, square jaw, broad shoulders—the epitome of an All-American man. In another time, another place, I might have been pleased to have him as a son-in-law. But not now.

I drew in deep, trying to retain control. It wasn't easy, and I found my hands shaking with rage. "Can you explain how you managed to work up to this?" If the boy had known me better, he would have realized that when my voice becomes that soft, I'm just about ready to go over the edge.

He cleared his throat. "Well, sir," he answered, cracking his voice anyway, "your daughter, Suzanne, is a very attractive girl. She's got a pretty face, a fantastic body, and she's not deformed. She's very healthy and intelligent and I don't think she'll have any trouble having kids."

Suzie, I always thought you had better sense than this! "And what does

Suzanne think about this?"

The boy brightened. "She feels pretty much the same way I do, sir. She wants normal, healthy children who'll have every chance in the world to make themselves a wonderful life."

"What about love?"

"Sir?" He looked confused, almost as though he really didn't know what I was talking about.

"Love, boy, love! Do you love my daughter?" I had the vain hope—knowing myself as I did—that if he loved Suzie, I would be able to overlook his brazen style and forgive it.

"What's love go to do with it?" he asked, unconsciously quoting an ancient song from my youth. I don't think he was aware that it even existed. "It's just a question of healthy genes. Love has nothing to do with it."

That was it. I snapped. He may have been the star running back in high school, but I had been a Navy SEAL during the Nineties and I had kept in very good shape. I pulled him up by the collar of his shirt and hauled him off to the door, banging him into various pieces of furniture and other obstacles, including one really good head shot against a door jamb. He struggled briefly, just until I applied a nerve pinch to his shoulder. He froze up, not even whimpering.

I opened the front door, still

holding the nerve pinch in place. Sweat was beginning to bead on his forehead and his eyes—when they were open—were glazed over in pain.

"Do not ever. Ever. Ever. Come near my little girl again. If you do, I will take that as a declaration that you no longer have a use for those two organs that hang below your belt which you were so eager to exercise on my daughter. Do you doubt that I have the ability to remove them for you?" A tiny shake of his head was all the answer I would get, as moving his head any more than a fraction of an inch caused agony the likes of which people will die to avoid if they know it's coming. "Very good. Now take your ass out of here and go find some street whore to fuck around with."

If he hadn't flailed around so much, he would have been a perfect example of projectile motion. As it was, he looked decidedly undignified when he went crashing into the street. He looked up at me with cuts and abrasions across his face—many of them bleeding freely—then picked himself up and fled as quickly as he could.

I watched him go for a minute or so, then I turned back into the house. My wife was long since gone; the only comforts I had left in my life were her picture-portrait over the mantle, the legacy she'd left me in the form of my lovely daughter, Suzanne, and the cheap beer in the refrigerator.

I pulled a plastic can off a six-pack and read the label. Stolnyi. Goddamn cheap Russian beer. I missed the good old days of American beer, the stuff that went down as smooth as the first time you slept with the one, true love of your life. Give me a "Bud" anyway.

I sat down in my favorite easy chair and stared up at my wife's portrait. God, she was a beautiful woman. Long, flowing blond tresses, green eyes that showed the

universe in them, a body that would have made Aphrodite herself wear a burlap sack, and a wonderful mind and personality. God only knows what she saw in an old war hound like me.

"Well, Lisandra," I said, "That was not at all what I expected." I had this crazy hope that—if there was a hereafter—Lisandra could hear and see me, and that she would approve of what I did.

"I guess things have changed some. When I was a boy his age, the idea was to get into a girl's pants **without** her parents knowing about it. Most of the guys I knew carried rubbers with them all the time just so if there was some unexpected action, there would be no evidence nine months later.

"Now this kid is coming to me and asking me if he can have my blessing to fuck my baby girl. Not marry her, not live with her, not go steady with her, but fuck her! In all my fifty-two years, I never thought I'd see the day when American morals had decayed that far.

"My grandfather didn't fight in World War II for that. My dad didn't fight in Viet Nam and I didn't go to war in the Middle East **and** The Final War to let that happen. We all went because we believed in the American way of life, because we believed in decency and honesty, and because we loved our country." I took a swig of beer and grimaced. Cheap shit.

"Now these kids are out there ruining the country with their bullshit morals and ethics. Why, just the other day I heard one of them on the street preaching euthanasia for anyone who developed a sickness that lasted for more than a week!" Tears filled my eyes as I thought about it. "A week!"

I looked out the bay window into the front yard of my property to see a couple of kids playing nicely on the side-

walk. They were normal kids, until I saw that one of them was a little boy with no eye sockets in his head. The other, a little girl, had a palsied arm. They were trying to play jacks. It came to me clearly then why the young man was so concerned about good genes. I wondered, then, how much of their disfigurement was my fault, how much of

my country's nuclear arsenal had found its way into these children's DNA. I said a prayer quietly to myself and begged those children to forgive me. I rose from my chair and went to find my daughter. It was time to have another father-daughter chat, and this time, I'd be doing the listening.



Tom Andreoni

Love in My World

To Marisol,
the love in my world

Love is that special feeling
of warmth and security I feel
when my body touches hers
as we sleep.
It is that glowing smile
—as bright as the sun—
she gives me
when we awake.

Love is the sight of her body,
or the sound of her voice.

Love is the feeling of sadness
when we're not together.
It is the way the thought of her
passes through me
like a warm ocean breeze.

Love is the look in her eyes,
or the smell of her hair.

Love is the emotion
which allows her
to vent her rage like a hurricane,
and lets her calm me
like the still sea at dawn.

Love is the child within her head,
and the woman within her breast.

Love is the child she gave me
who runs about the room.

Love is our child she carries
within her womb.

Love is as bright as the sun
and as deep as the sea.

Love, in my world,
is the sea and the sun
—mar y sol—

Marisol

Pinnicue Johnson

Sweet 16

There she go.
She walk slowly now.
Ain't no one gonna mess with her.
no more sing and sway.
no more bump and grind.
The pleasures of the world
In her rounded behind.

There she go.
Ain't no need for speed,
Her belly before her like a scarlet deed
One of sixteen men could've plated that seed.

Pinnicue Johnson

Ghetto

In these dark crowded spaces
Little girls wear the wisdom
of the ages
Upon hardened faces.
They walk in anxious, gyrating paces

Emulating what they think they see.





Barbara Rosen

Being

Living gets real quiet
Closet quiet
Like unused possibilities
Stacked on a shelf
Stale
Like closet air
Barely circulating
But breathable
Waiting for the door to open
To let tomorrow happen.

Todd D. Stevens

untitled

"Boy, a niggers gotta smoke sometin'," he said, bringing his favorite dimpled beer can to his lips and bringing the thick, white smoke to his grizzled old lungs.

"Ya see, you got the holy ghost. I play it in you when you play that guitar. Joe boy, I said shit, you sho' can play dat muddafucker. I see dat holy ghost shinen' on."

Now it was my turn to smoke the cocaine and talk shit. "I don't know," I said, trying to hold in the expensive smoke, "what you're talking about. You sound more like a preacher than a rock-head."

Willy's mind was no longer on talking. The crack was gone and he wanted more. "Wha' cho got that we can sell," he asked as he lifted himself from the floor.

"You ain't taking my shit. I ain't gonna support your habit. Smoking this is just a hobby of mine, not a full-time occupation."

"We'll see," he said as we both headed for the door.

"I'll see you later Willy." We both went in opposite directions, I to my apartment and Willy to his streets. As I sat there in my bare floored slum, I kept hearing Willy's voice over and over again. "You got the holy ghost."

"You got the holy ghost." What the hell did that mean?

Crashing off the coke I made a path to a bottle of Jack Daniels I had had since

New Year's, and quickly took a belt. It burned. I didn't care. My brain was reeling, my stomach twisting and now the phone was ringing. Luckily I had an answering machine and after my stupid attempt at humor greeted my caller I heard Glenn's urgent voice, "Yo, Joe, you're never there when I got good news. We got a gig tomorrow night if you can get your sorry ass to Churchill's. Let's not blow it this time, we could make some money. Call." And the familiar beep told me it was okay to move, but instead I passed out. The world could wait.

"We're all on the same path Joe." I heard the voice but couldn't see the face.

"Your heart is the river," the voice said.

"Why don't you show your face?"

"Joe, that is the beauty of dream. If you could really see then you would know my face. We wouldn't even need to talk."

"Why do you only talk to me when I dream?"

"I don't."

"Who are you?"

I found myself in a forest, alone and cold. I was not on Miami Beach. Before me appeared a short man. It was Willy. He was smoking from a dark pipe and sitting cross-legged on the forest floor.

"You know boy, this is a big world. It don't mean a shit if you is made or broke. Ya see, there is only your heart that means a

God-damn." And he dragged on the pipe so long and hard it made me uptight. Then he said, "The things you think you know cloud the truth."

He vanished but the smoke from his lungs lingered, taking the shape of a guitar, and then, a crack pipe. The ringing of the phone woke me up. It was eleven a.m.

"Hello."

"Listen, you gotta make it to this gig tonight. If we pull it off it could pave the way for gravy. What time can we get together and go over a few things?"

"C'mon Glenn, what do we need to go over? We know this stuff like the back of our hands. What time do you wanna start?"

"The gig starts at ten, but I don't want what happened last time to reoccur. Tonight we play our slick, programmed set."

"Yeah, right, the twenty-minute 'Louie-Louie' is gonna wow 'em. I'll see you there," I said.

"Don't fuck up."

I thought I put on a good show for Glenn, considering how shitty I felt. I pulled myself together enough to venture to the window. Willy was down in the alley eating a can of sardines. I threw on some clothes and ran down.

"What is it you're doing here," I asked him.

"Eating my Goddamn breakfast."

"Be more general. What is your life about?"

"You ought know better than to ask a man personal questions while he's trying to eat."

"Willy, are you ever happy."

"When I got me a rock or a bitch, but if they is gone I'm a sorry man. My life is pain and delight walking hand in hand."

Listening to Willy I realized that the

faceless voice in the dream was his also. "This life's taking its toll. I can't deal," I said.

"Boy, you got any money," he asked, "if you want to talk to Willy, then we do it his way. Give me five-dollars, I know you got it."

I took my last three dollars out and gave it to him.

"I'll be back in five minutes," he said.

When he came back he brought me to his room, the electrical vault, and we sat on the floor. He produced his can and went through this ritual of first making a bed of cigarette ash, and then laying the rock on top of it. He handed me the pipe.

"Now don't hit it hard, just take it in nice and easy. I'll light it."

I smoked the little rock into my lungs, tasting its almost plastic-like flavor pass over my tongue and immediately feeling the warmth hit my brain, kicking it. My bowels almost fell out as my stomach tightened. I loved it and knew all the while I was sinking into addictions bosom, like a baby.

"Now you know what my life is boy. You is laying with my lover as I speak. She can be anybody's if you can pay. You can feel the riddle of your life solving before you. You know it," he said.

So basically, I'm stealing a peek at oblivion when I smoke. No one can touch me here. I'm in the hands of God."

"You always there. You jus' can't see. As long as you is blind the world's gonna eat at you. The more you fight, the harder it chews."

He smoked long and hard and I recalled my dream as I watched him puff.

"What brought you to the streets," I asked.

"Why do you live in this shit?"

"Because I can't be 'round people."

"What's wrong with people?"

"People is what makes me suffer, brings me pain."

Already I could feel the high escape me, feel myself slipping out of those sheltering hands and into reality. "I need to talk some more. I only tasted the waters. I need to swim in them. Do you have more?" I had gotten frantic when Willy pulled out a popcorn sized rock and smiled.

"You got yourself a new bitch, don'cha boy."

The smoke blew thick in that vault and ten p.m. came and passed. I was so high that It didn't matter if we got blown to kingdom-come.

"C'mon Willy, you can get some good money for my stereo, then we could smoke for a week."

"Bring it on down," he said, and in a strange way sounded like Bob Barker on The Price is Right.

It didn't take long to smoke my stereo. Willy had some sense about him and knew when to call a binge a night.

"I don' wanna bleed you dry in one sitting. I ain't gonna let you sell your guitar for crack. Now drink this," he said holding a bottle of cough syrup out to me.

"Why you giving me cough medicine?"

"It'll help ease your fall. Drink that bottle and then this one."

The hollow feeling inside me could not be filled by anything other than crack. Robitussin wasn't cutting it. I went and got the rest of my Jack Daniels and polished that off. It was a long time before I slept. I had enough brain left to take the phone off the hook. Then I laid there rolling myself to sleep, the sun shining through my window. I got up to go to the bathroom and it was dark. I had a drink of water and went back to sleep.

"Joe, the river is deep. Some learn to swim, others float but some drown," the familiar voice said, not near but not far.

I asked, "What am I, a swimmer or a floater?"

"You'll have to answer that yourself."

"Willy, you're talking very clearly, what's the put-on?"

"The put-on is that I'm not Willy," the voice said.

"Then who are you."

I am the holy ghost come to you to laugh, for yours is the comedy of life ringing true. Truth brought through fright."

"I am the king. I rule my destiny," I cried out, "you can laugh because the truth is this miserable life, and you, you're a fucking ghost."

"Don't be so bitter, you could see if you could only open your eyes."

And in front of me was a table and on it, only a pipe and matches. I placed the pipe to my lips and lit, inhaling a vision of death and decay. I jumped out of my bed, sweating and shaking. I couldn't go near it afraid that something from my dream would rise from it and throw me to hell. I put on some shorts and walked to the beach. It was only four in the morning but I needed to swim and wake up.

"Crack has made me crazy," I said to myself, "I blew off a paying gig to get stoned with a bum and sell my stereo."

I let the cool ocean water-clean the sweat from me but it couldn't wash away my self-hate. What could I tell Glenn? This would probably be irreparable. I waited till nine to call him.

"Glenn?"

"Fuck you man, you blew it. Not just for yourself but for me too. I mean, I don't give a shit about you or your life man, you fucked *me* up, and that ain't gonna happen again."

And with that he hung up. I tried calling him back but he took his phone off the hook. I went down to the alley to find Willy, but he wasn't around. I never felt more alone. My only friend on Miami Beach was a crack bum and I couldn't find him, so I spent the day walking the streets of Southbeach, broke and lonely. If I had any family, now would've been the time to call, but such is life.

The holy ghost had come back to haunt me as I walked the streets making my way back to the sand of the beach. I sat down next to some foreign tourists.

"Ever have the blues," I asked one of them, an older man wearing Madras bermuda shorts and loafers. He just stared at me like an idiot.

"Can you speak E N G L I S H," I asked.

"Ah...ummm...ah..."

"In other words you're as dumb as a rock, right," I asked as I nodded my head 'yes.'

He silently nodded his head 'yes.'

"Good," I said, "then you must be familiar with the comedy of life, yes?" I nodded.

Again he replied with a nod.

"Then you, sir, must be acquainted

with the Holy ghost."

Again the nod. By now I grew tired of this. I could not enjoy the comedy of life at this point. It had all become bullshit and suffering. I wanted to dance again like the world meant what it should. I wanted Pomp and Circumstance playing while I ate cake. I walked back to my apartment and en route came across Willy trying to run a con.

"You sure got the life," I said, "the only thing you worry about is your Jones, the rest seems to fall into place."

"Boy you see the way I worked dat con? That was the world at my fingertips. I had the fool thinkin' he was rippin' me off. The secret is to float. Everytime I look at you I see you grabbin' at straws. You sinkin' all the time. All you have to see is that yous on dry land and can only sink to your back. Your problem boy is that you trying too hard."

"Always got the answers, don'tcha Willy. Well fuck you."

I walked back to my apartment. My door was wide open. Everything that I owned that was of any value was gone. I sat on the curb and all that I did was laugh. And while I sat there laughing hysterically I heard on a passing car's radio the song "Let it Bleed" by the Rolling Stones.





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